Haya's Narrative

You and I

Chapter 1

Céline Adams

I've been stuck here for so, so, so long. ~~1564 days.~~ Four white walls, too white, way too white. A bed, a couch, a chair, and an entrance area on the left of the wall for food. This place feels like an asylum. ~~Probably because it is~~. I take medication everyday because people say I have hallucinations. They pried my sister off me before they forced me here. I have one window to my right. I've been staring at it for -I'm not sure how long- there's nothing to do.

1564 days.
223 weeks.
4 years.

There are no birds, no animals, no trees -only dead ones - and all I can see is the sight of people getting killed by the asylum's workers. So, instead of staring at that sight, I look into the sky. A dark, gloomy, depressing sky.

1564 days.

"Céline Adams, subject no. 52! Food will be dropped soon." I hear the announcer's voice through the door. God, his voice makes my skin turn inside out. Usually, 'soon' means in 2-3 hours. Or... I just don't get food at all!

~~*Good for me!*~~

I have no belongings, except a journal and a pen I stole from a worker.
And suddenly, my door burst open as workers force someone in. However, it's too dark to see. ~~Lights close after six pm.~~ Although, it seems to be a girl. The doors close and now I'm stuck with a girl I don't know.

~~*If I were insane, would I know? Would I know? Would I KNOW? If I were insane, would I know? Would I know? Would I KNOW?If I were insane, would I know? Would I know? Would I KNOW? If I were insane, would I know? Would I know? Would I KNOW?If I were insane, would I know? Would I know? Would I KNOW?If I were insane, would I know? Would I know? Would I KNOW?If I were insane, would I know? Would I know? Would I KNOW?If I were insane, would I know? Would I know? Would I KNOW?*~~

Chapter 2

Lauren Harper

What a plot twist! I get forced into an asylum with some weird chick I have to spy on. Honestly, I do NOT get paid enough for this. I don't get paid at all!

“Hello?” I quietly ask the girl.
No answer.

“Can you hear me?” I ask once more. Still… no reply.

So I'm not only stuck with some insane girl, she's also ignorant?! People these days! No manners at a—

“Hello…” She replies timidly. Ok… maybe I was too quick to judge. Way too quick.

“My name's Lauren, how about you?” I question, trying to start a conversation. I can't see her at all. I'm not sure if that's a good thing or not.
No reply. Again. I just have to be patient. Or I'm delusional. *Probably all of the above.*

“Céline.” She finally responds.

“Cool name… you're very quiet you know? Not all the people I know are this quiet. I wasn't sure if you were even alive—”

“Can you PLEASE stop talking?! You’re giving me a headache!” She snaps at me.
Ouch. Rude.

“WOAH! I did NOT sign up for this abusive relationship, psycho!” I bite back, all she does is roll her eyes, at least I think that's all she did.

So… new observation, psycho-chick does indeed talk. And has a snappy attitude as well. Wow… my boss is going to “love” this discovery. At least from what he can see, he already planted a camera in the top left corner of the room before she came here. So he's been technically monitoring her for 4 years. I'm only sent here for extra work. *People just LOVE to torture me, don't they?*

Chapter 3

Damien Blackwell

I’ve been watching her for years. Céline Adams. Subject 52. Her eyes have always been distant, almost artificial and emotionless. Deep blue dead eyes that could kill with a glance. She doesn’t speak unless spoken to, and even then, her words are sharp. And you can tell she means it. The first time she spoke, the very first time I heard her say something, it freaked me out. ‘If I were insane, would I know?’ I sat there, transfixed, nerves stretched thin as I heard her repeat that phrase to herself. 3,456 times. I watched her say that exact phrase 3,456 times.

It took 6 hours.

Yet, it's clear beneath most of that silence, I can sense something growing and developing in her. Something heavily dangerous. I’m no fool, I know exactly what she's doing. She's trying to find something— a special someone. Her sister, *Isabelle Adams.* I can see it in the way her eyes

flicker when the staff not so discreetly mentions her name. How she clutches that stupid journal like it's a lifeline. It's always been the same things for her: medication, isolation, and starvation. She's waiting for something. For what? I can't tell.

The thing is, I couldn't care less about Isabelle Adams, Céline was the one who piqued my interest. When she was first assigned to me, years ago, there was something about her that captured my curiosity. As she sits in her cell, mumbling, whispering, and scribbling something in her journal. And yet, it was somehow related to her sister. Céline wasn't insane like the other patients, she seemed normal. Like she could do no harm. I remember once she left her journal open to go get her food, so I zoomed into it. The words had *scarred* me. The handwriting was frantic. Messy. Almost as if in a rush as she wrote:

'RUN. Run like your parents had told you. Run like how your sister ran. Run until you feel your limbs go numb and the blood rush from your body. Run until you feel the blood dripping from your fingers. DRIP, DROP, DRIP, DROP, DRIP, DROP. I keep thinking I need to stay calm, that it's all in my head, that I'm not insane. People aren't forgotten like this. Not abandoned like this. My hands are shaking as I write this, this pen is my only voice, my only outlet. I keep staring at things. The lines of my finger tips, the gray of the concrete, the brown of my hair. Today is a day. Today is a day of the week. Today is day 156. Please. It's so cold. It's so cold. It's so cold. It's so cold.'

I couldn't bear to look at that journal anymore. Yet, I did.

'Loneliness should be a contradiction. It's when you have no one to hold you or support you. No friends or family. Yet, loneliness is that friend. It caresses and plays with your hair as you cry at night. Whispering sweet nothings in your ear. It hugs you so *tight* to the point where it suffocates you. Like a snake wrapping itself tightly around your neck.'

Chapter 4

Lauren Harper

Céline is a real piece of work. She barely talks, when she does, it's like she's choosing her words— carefully. Precisely. Like her words are meant to cut into people's souls and rip them

apart. Bit by bit. I mean— I dont think she's *crazy*. Dangerous? Sure. But insane? Absolutely—NOT! I've been in this asylum for a few days now, and honestly, I have to admire her resilience, because I've only been here for what— 4 days? And I think I'm already going insane. But that's not the point. I've been blending in, pretending to be some unlucky person. What's my real job? To report to Blackwell. Damien Blackwell doesn't appreciate questions, loathes incompetence, and sure as hell hates laziness. I spare the camera a discreet glance. He's watching her. Watching me. Watching us.

"You're staring." Céline mumbles.

"Oh yea? You're talking like you're a serial killer in a documentary." I scoff.

She tilts her head, "Is that so?"

I don't like the way she's assessing me. Like she's trying to decide if I'm worth talking to. Well jokes on her! I'm in control here. Or at least I think I am.

Chapter 5

Céline Adams

'If I could be a bird, I'd be one trapped in a cage, no escape, no sight of its future, a bird meant to soar high getting trapped and only meant to die. A bird watching other birds fly and soar high. But the moment it tries to use its wings, they're cut off.'

Lauren is intrusive.
Too intrusive. Nosy.
She asks too many questions. Her words feel practiced. Clearly thought and almost….calculated. And it's the way looks at the wall... ~~like she's checking in with someone.~~ She's not here because she's *insane.*
~~*She's not a patient.*~~
That realization hits me like a bucket of cold water over my head. Lauren is watching me. *Observing me.* ~~And clearly, it's not only her doing the watching~~. I pull myself back to reality. Forcing myself to stay calm. Instead, I smile at her,it feels unnatural on my lips, clearly it's been

a long time since I've had to do so. Because if Lauren's both watching *and* being watched. ~~Then I am too.~~

~~*If I were insane, I WOULD know.*~~

Chapter 6

Damien Blackwell

She knows. I can see it in the way her eyes flicker towards the camera… the way her head tilts for even a millisecond. *Céline Adams has always been observant*. That's what made her dangerous. Four years. I have spent four years monitoring, observing, and studying her. I have memorized every twitch of her fingers, every flutter of her eyelashes, I have dissected and noticed every breath she took in that cell of hers. I have seen her at her lowest. I had seen her when she kept mumbling and muttering to herself, thinking no one was watching. And *I* had watched her mumble to herself, lost in a never ending loop of words.

'*If I were insane, would I know?'* The first time I noticed it, I immediately became transfixed. It caught my attention in a way nothing has before. The hundredth time, I'd lean in and listen. And the thousandth time, I finally understood her. Céline Adams was never insane, not once in her life had she gone insane. *She's conscious.* And that's what makes her lethal. And now, she's clearly putting pieces together.

"Let's see what you do next, Céline Adams." I mutter under my breath.

Chapter 7

Céline Adams

I don't have much time. Lauren is my only chance, if she was sent here to watch me, she must have a way out. So I talk, not a lot, just enough to get under her skin. To make her think I want to trust her. To make her believe me.

“Why are you here?” I ask one night, my voice a low whisper.
She stiffens, and that's all the answers I need.

“Bad luck.” She mutters in a flat voice. ~~Liars go to fire.~~

“You're lying,” I mumble, “You're not here because of ‘bad luck’.” She hesitates and it takes all the forces inside me not to smile.
I scoot closer to her.

“Help me escape,” I press, “I know you're not meant to be here.” ~~Someone's watching. I know it.~~

Lauren's eyes widened, “What the— are you *insane?!*”
Ha. Ironic isn't it?

“Maybe, but that's not the point is it? Help. Me. Escape.”

Chapter 8

Lauren Harper

This is bad. This is *so, so bad.* She was never just a patient— she was a volcano just patiently waiting to erupt. She clearly wants her sister back. She's a storm.

And I somehow got caught up in it.

Chapter 9

Damien Blackwell

The moment I see Lauren hesitate, I know she'll help her. I should be enraged. I should be angry. I should intervene. But I won't. I get a horribly twisted sense of amusement and satisfaction from watching her try to win. Watching her try to escape. But she won't. Why? I refuse to allow that.

Chapter 10

Céline Adams

The plan was simple, Lauren would distract security and I'd slip past her and get out of this hellhole. But as always, the universe just *happens* to be against me at all times. Alarms flare, doors slam shut, and the walls are covered in red hue. And then I see him. A man I can't seem to recognize for the life of me. His eyes are black, creepily black. Black hair to match and black clothing as well. *Soo… wearing black is just a 'trend' now? Whose funeral are we attending?!* That's not the point. He looks terrifying. He's standing between us and the exit.

"Going somewhere, Céline?" He sounds calm, almost amused. Like he knew this would happen. I can tell Lauren's staring at him. Pure horror in her eyes.

"Blackwell—" She mumbles out. *Blackwell?* I can't tell if that's a first name or a last name. ~~Probably last.~~ Why am I even thinking like this at a time like *this?!* Maybe I truly am insane. I don't know who he is. I don't know of him. But clearly, I've lost this game.

Chapter 11

Damien Blackwell

She's looking at me like she's seeing a monster. I don't blame her. I take a step forward. She takes a step back.

"You've been very amusing," I taunt, "but I think it's time we stop the act."

"I don't know what you're talking about," she mutters.

"Liar, liar, pants on fire," I mumble in a mocking tone. Her eyes flicker for just a moment. And her hands clench into fists. I noticed it. I've *always* noticed it.

“You've always wanted to see your sister,” I say, watching as her eyes narrowed to slits, “What if I told you I could help you find her? What if I told you everything you've missed about yourself?”

Her breath catches in her throat and I immediately know I've won. She's like a bird, meant to soar high, but her wings get cut off.

Chapter 12

Céline Adams

He's lying. He has to be lying. There's no way. ~~But what if he's not?~~ These walls feel suffocating. Quiet. I tried to escape. I failed. I have no other choice but to listen to him.

Chapter 13

Damien Blackwell

There are moments in life where control is determined. Holding a gun against someone's throat, signing a contract, watching someone break under your words. Although, there are moments like this where control could be considered an illusion. *A vision, or a simple, fragile piece of a person's imagination.* A war between two people who refuse to lose. Lauren is standing aside as I just watch Céline. Her face is stoic, but her eyes speak a million words. I've always been good at reading emotions. Hers are very simple. Hatred, fury, defiance, and anger. *A Lot* of anger.

“You don't trust me.” I exhale slowly, tilting my head. She lets out a sharp, humorless laugh.

“NO WAY! Really? I wonder why…” She says sarcastically. *There we go again, I was wrong for thinking she'd be quiet.*

“You should fear me,” I mumble.

“I don't fear men who play cop,” She snaps at me.

“You're mistaking me for someone who gives justice,” I murmur, “I don't *do* justice.”

She hesitates and a slow smile spreads across my face. She's considering my words, and that, more than anything, means I win.

Chapter 14

Céline Adams

I hate him.
No, hate doesn't even describe anything in feel. There isn’t a word for what I feel for Damien Blackwell. It’s something deeper, like a virus in my stomach that I can’t shake. He stands there, all calm, like he has all the time in the world. Like he owns me. Like he owns anyone. ~~Arrogance can easily change a person.~~

I force myself to breathe.

“Say I believe you, say I believe that you can help me find my sister,” I whisper.

His lips twitch, threatening to break into a small smile. “Smart girl,” he grumbled.

“If I believe you,” I continue, “then you have to give me proof.”

His eyes darkened, a flicker of amusement or irritation visible in his eyes. *Probably both.*

“I already have,” he mutters.

And before I can speak, his gaze flickers to my journal, and my blood runs cold.

“I’ve been leaving you clues, Céline. Clues everywhere. In your medicine, your food, even your journal,” his voice is quiet, almost soothing. *Lies.* “You’ve been so focused on escaping, you never stopped to see the real way out. When the real escape was right under your nose.”

I immediately started flipping through the pages of my journal. Searching for a message until I found one. One that isn't in my handwriting.

"You're not insane, but you won't remember." My breath catches. ~~I was never hallucinating, those were memories coming back…~~

"What the actual—" Lauren starts, but gets cut off.

"You wiped my memory," I say, my voice a breathless whisper.

"You know… I could've let you rot in here," he murmurs, his voice dangerously soft, "But I saw potential in you. I don't like wasting potential."

"Take me to her," I demand.

He smiles. *I just made a deal with the devil.*

Chapter 15

Damien Blackwell

She's stuck with me now. Céline Adams is not something to be owned. She's something to be studied, unraveled, and understood. And for the first time in 1564 days, she's seeing the real-world. I step aside from the door and motion for her to follow. Lauren is staring at me like I've lost my mind. The guards don't stop us, they know better.

We step outside, and for the first time in four years, Céline is free.

Chapter 16

Céline Adams

The asylum stands behind me, towering over me and I don't want to look back. I won't. I won't give Damien the satisfaction of a reaction. Lauren is tense behind me, breathing unevenly, she looks like she isn't sure whether or not to be relieved or terrified. I glance at Damien, he's walking like the world bends to him, not the other way around. The man who's been observing me for four years, picking apart my mind piece by piece like a puzzle he refuses to leave unsolved.

~~I should run.~~

~~I should fight~~

But I don't.

"Where is she?" I press.

He doesn't falter. No, not even a little bit.

"I'll take you to her," Blackwell replies. I *want* to fight. Except…I have no choice but to listen to him.

Chapter 17

Lauren Harper

This is bad. This is so, so, bad. I thought I knew this game. But I clearly don't. And right now, I'm walking into the unknown with the two most dangerous people I've ever met. Damien Blackwell. And Céline Adams. She thinks she's manipulating him. She thinks she's using him. But she's already lost a game that hasn't started yet. And for once, I want to see how this ends.

Chapter 18

Damien Blackwell

We are currently in the car, the city lights breaking through the darkness as we drive. Céline is in the back, her fingers tapping nervously on her arm. Lauren looks like she wishes the ground would just open up and swallow her whole.

They don't get it yet.

This isn't just about her sister, this isn't about her past. This is about *Céline.* Because it's *her* that's the experiment. The moment I saw her, I knew she wasn't just a patient, she was *aware*, she was and still is a storm wrapped in human skin and bones. But the thing is, storms aren't locked… they destroy everything they see. She doesn't know it yet, but she will. And when she does…

I'll be with her. Because I didn't free Céline.

I let her go.

And now, it's irreversible.

Chapter 19

Céline Adams

The car stops and I'm in front of a dark house, this is where Blackwell said she'd be. I knock on the door, it creaks open and—

Nothing.

I turn to Damien, roughly shoving him backwards, "Where is she?! You said she'd be here.!"

"I said I'd take you to her," he mutters, "and so I did."

It takes me a second to realize, but then I see it.

A journal, *my* journal. Just… a copy of it. But with something written.

I take a few hesitant steps towards it, it is an exact copy, but the last entry is different. The ink is fresh and I can tell someone else wrote it.

"She will come, she will search, but she will not find what she's looking for. Because reality is not where she thought it was."

A dreaded, slow, realization floods through my mind.

~~This was never about Isabelle… this was about *me.*~~

I'm about to faint before Damien starts speaking, a ghost of a smile on his face, "She was never here, Céline."

A few moments pass and I hear footsteps approaching

I can barely turn around before—

Darkness. Absolute darkness.

Epilogue

Damien Blackwell

-excerpt from Céline's journal-
'Truth should really be a lie. It hides, it shifts to people's will, and most importantly, ~~it suffocates you~~. I would dig and dig and dig until I had unraveled every single lie. The ironic thing is, there is no truth. ~~Only the version of it that survives.~~'

I never planned for this to happen, a person can say I just… predicted. Céline was never locked away due to 'weakness.' She was locked away because people *feared* her. I know she'll remember eventually.

The blood… the screaming… *the moment people feared her.*

And she'll come running back to me. Because I have paved every road she'll cross. Every. Single. Road. She will realize that every door will open by *my* hands, that every person she turns to has spoken *my* name. The life she was so desperate to reclaim has always and will always be in *my* hands.

Because at the end of the day…

Céline Adams was never the *victim.*
She was the *monster.*

All she needs to do is remember.

Safa's Narrative

A dark, endless void, filled with nothing but a piercing silence…

"Lily, Lily! Class has started," called by bestfriend, Hannah.

I snapped back to reality; snapped back to the class that was as bright as a pitch black room. The class was filled with nothing but a mixture of our teacher's explanation and the students' deafening silence. To my terror, I heard the forbidden words

"Lily, why don't you come up and answer?" she said with an expressionless face.

I walked up as slowly as I could, scrambling to find an answer.

"Since you were so busy talking, go ahead and tell the principal those interesting events," she stated blankly.

Something seemed peculiar; our teacher was so calm, my classmates were on their best behavior, and my best friend DIDN'T defend me,something is definitely weird. As soon as I leave the classroom, my ears start to pick up a subtle sound…thud, thud, thud, where is the source? The pounding grew louder, thud, thud, thud, as I approached the principal's office. I hesitated before opening the door, where Mrs. Anderson (our principal) sat stiffly at her desk, her movements seeming robotic. "Come in," she said flatly, with not a tone of warmth in her voice.

I stepped inside, and the room felt off—dim, heavy, with strange symbols scattered across the papers on her desk. The thudding intensified, now sounding like a heartbeat.

"Time doesn't work the way you think it does here," Mrs. Anderson stated, her eyes flickering black. "This place is an experiment. You've been chosen."

Before I could respond, the floor beneath me gave way, and I fell—not down, but forward, into a void. I landed in a new world, dark and twisted.

Hannah stood in the distance, her smile eerie, her eyes hollow, her stance stiff.

"You've entered the real deal now, Lily," she said, her voice strange, "Enjoy."

"Hannah! Why are you here, why are we here??" I questioned desperately, but with no luck, just a painfully loud silence. I look around the dim room, it's seemingly endless, with nothing but a familiar table right at the center, where have I seen that?! I tug at my hair in a desperate attempt to recall the moment, then it hits me. THE OFFICE! This is Ms. Anderson's desk! But why is it here?

"She's definitely brighter than the other experiment, that's for sure," I hear a faint whisper from above, fading into a repeated echo.

"Congrats! You passed the first task, good luck with the next step, until then, farewell!" the unidentified person voiced once more before disappearing once more. In a swirl of chaos, I calmed myself down and looked at the symbols that lie before me. Once more, they seemed familiar, but they were so peculiar, almost like…like what?! My mind was so foggy and my thoughts were the only thing running. I know where I've seen it, Museum of Illusion! I decoded all the symbols according to the tricks in the lighting. Y..O..U.., 'you have passed!' is what it spelled.

"Correct!" the voice, now clear as day, yelled in an exaggerated excitement, "You're free to go, toodles!"

I was dragged through the void once more, with a much more lenient force, landing me back to my seat in class.

"Lily, may you come up and answer?" my teacher asked.

Wait, how am I back here? At least it's all over, for now.

Sama's Narrative

Anne and the Enchanted Forest

In a dark, enchanted forest sat a girl seeking help she had just been lost, her name was Anne. Anne got up to start seeking shelter, and after some time, she found a large oak tree. As she was setting up her “new home”, a small creature landed on her shoulder.” AHH…”, screamed Anne as she removed the creature. It looked like a fairy dragon, those things were really rare, and only approximately 2,500 exist around the world.

All of a sudden the setting changed.

“Act one, scene one… CUT!”, said the producer.

Anne was a character from a movie, her real name was Joud. Joud has been acting for about 15 years, played a major role in 7 movies, has been on the cover of many magazines, and is well-known all around the world. She was acting in the movie “ The Enchanted fairy-dragon Forest”. It was about a girl called Anne who had just been lost in a forest full of fairy dragons, there was no one there, nothing… just 1,000 fairy dragons and a door about 3 miles away, she could see it from a distance.

Joud had just got off duty, she had finished the first scene. Joud was given a 5-minute break in between each set.

She went to sit on a nearby couch and said to herself, “Is this really over?”.

After 15 years, her acting career had come to an end; this had been the last movie she played in. She couldn’t believe that all this practice and hard work had ended. Joud grew up in a poor household, she promised her parents to pay them back one day for all the suffering they had done for her. She had a passion for acting and promised herself she would someday be an actor.

Although she was sad about the retirement, she was happy for the hard work she put into acting, at the end of the day it paid off. Every month she earned approximately 100,000. She decided that after each payment she would give half of her earnings to her parents.

Joud went to continue her next scene, as she was heading to her next set she saw something flying in the distance. Had she seen a fairy-dragon on set? This can’t be real.
But as she walked outside, something started glowing in the distance. She followed the light, leading her to a forest behind the studio.
She heard a whisper. “Anne… help us…”
She held her breath. That was her character’s name. But this wasn’t a script. This was real.

Emine’s Narrative

The Doll

“Oh, Mom, look! There’s a doll there!” said Avery while pointing at it.

Avery’s mother looked over at where Avery was pointing and said, “Aww, such a cute doll, isn’t it?”

The doll had long blonde hair, with blue eyes and long lashes, thick eyebrows, and was wearing a pink dress. It captured Avery’s attention as Avery was a normal five-year-old who loved dolls. Then Avery requested, “Mom, can we *pleaseee* take this doll home with us?” She spoke in a whiny tone, looking at her mother with big doe eyes.

Avery’s mother couldn’t resist those eyes and said, “Okay, okay, fine. We can take it home with us.”

“Yayyy!” exclaimed Avery in an excited tone.

Then, after Avery took the doll, they started walking back home. The mom chuckled softly at Avery’s excitement over the doll. When they reached home, Avery’s mother told Avery, “Put the doll in your room and come down to eat dinner.”

Avery obediently listened to her mother and went to the room to put the doll away. After she kept the doll, she left the room, but there was a weird sensation after she left… The doll's head suddenly shifted slightly toward the door Avery left from.

After some time, the mother finished cooking dinner, and they started to eat. As they were eating, they suddenly heard a thud upstairs. Avery heard it and asked, “Did you hear that thud? It sounded like it came from my room.”

“I heard it, honey, but I think something just fell. Nothing weird,” replied Avery’s mother.

“Whatever you say, Mom,” Avery told her with a small, cautious smile.

As they finished their dinner, Avery’s mother started cleaning up, while Avery went to her room to sleep because it was her bedtime and she had school tomorrow. When she entered the room, she felt something weird. She realized that the doll's head was tilted slightly toward the door.

This creeped Avery out and sent a shiver down her spine, but she ignored the thought by shaking her head and went to sleep. While she was sleeping, the doll's head shifted toward where Avery was sleeping once more. The doll was watching Avery sleep while one of its eyes

turned slightly red, a mischievous smile forming on the doll's face before everything went back to normal, the doll tilting her head back to its old position.

In the morning, Avery's mother woke Avery up for school. After Avery woke up, she started getting ready for school. As she finished getting ready, she went to play with the doll for a bit before going downstairs to eat breakfast. While going down the stairs, she was able to smell the pancakes her mother made, which made her stomach grumble.

"Avery, honey, breakfast is ready!" called out her mother.

"I'm coming, Mom!" replied Avery.

When she reached downstairs, she sat at the dining table, patiently waiting for her plate of pancakes. After a few minutes, Avery's mother brought Avery a plate of golden, fluffy pancakes with syrup on top. Avery looked at the food with a huge smile and took a bite of the pancake while moaning from how good it was.

Afterwards, she went to school.

Later in the afternoon, her school was over, and she went back home. As she entered, she saw her mother and said, "Hi, Mom."

"Hi, honey," her mother replied.

After the greeting, Avery went to her room and changed into her pajamas before sitting on her bed. While she was sitting on her bed, she felt like something was wrong in the room, which made her arm hair stand up, giving her goosebumps.

She turned her head to the doll, and her eyes widened with fear as she saw the doll grinning mischievously.

Avery's eyes started welling up with tears as she saw this scene unfold. The doll's eyes turned red, the grin growing wider, and as Avery was about to scream, the doll took Avery's soul within seconds, putting it back in the doll.

Then the mother came in as she heard some noises and entered Avery's room, but when she entered, she saw that everything was normal and Avery was sitting at her desk.

But in reality, the doll was in Avery's body…

Farida's Narrative

Echoes of the Graveyard

There she was, standing in front of my housework the other time… no matter how much I urge someone to look at her, they always say the same thing over and over again,

“There isn't anyone there…are you sure you're feeling well?”

They make me feel like I've gone crazy…ever since that day at the graveyard, things have been weird.

May 22, 1978. My friends and I are standing outside the school gates, waiting for my parents to pick us up. ***Ring! ring! ring!*** My phone rang. I answered, hearing my father's voice on the other end.

“Hey son uh…” he hesitated. “I'm sorry, I don't think i can pick you and your friends up, I remembered I have an errand to attend to. I'll be back tonight. Stay safe!”

He immediately hung up. Now, we don't have a choice but to walk home.

“Guys, we have to walk home, my father's busy.” I said.

“What? But it's going to rain soon!” My friend exclaimed.

I look up at the sky, the clouds are rolling in. The sky is getting dark fast, hinting that the rain is going to pour down in torrents.

“But hey, I'm feeling a little bored. Why don't we play around a little?” Another friend voiced.

“Isn't that a bad idea? I mean, it's going to rain soon. I think we should get back to my house first.” I warned.

Reluctantly, they agreed. As we were walking down a pathway, we passed by a graveyard. It's dark and mysterious, the smell of rotten flesh and animals everywhere, mice flitting about. ***Disgusting.*** Has this thing ever been cleaned before?

“Dude, why don't we check out this graveyard. It's abandoned, but it seems like something fun for our pastime!” My friend exclaimed.

Has he gone mad or what?

“It does seem fun, let's go inside!” The other yelled.

“What? Guys no this is–”

Before I could even begin to speak, I had found myself inside. ***Tap tap tap…shhhhh!***
Oh great, it's raining. What perfect timing! I had tried to convince my friends to leave, but they wouldn't budge. Now, I'm stuck exploring this abandoned graveyard. *Sigh. I'll have to put up with it.*

My friend dragged the other into another direction, completely forgetting about me. I'm now drenched in the rain, my body shivering and my teeth chattering. I have no choice but to look for them. I stroll down a path, when ***BAM!...*** I heard a loud noise. I suddenly hear a lot of whispers and murmurs of my name.

“Zyren..Zyren!” I gasp.

“Who is that?!” I exclaim, looking from side to side.

No one. I have to get out of here quickly. I swiftly grab my phone and ring up my friends. ***Ring, ring, ring…*** they aren’t replying. I’m running out of time, the whispers of my name getting closer and louder. I sprint to the gates, anxious. I have to get out **now.** ***WOOSH —*** Without warning, a ghost dropped down, its face inches away from my own. All I could see was its face, twisted and hollow. Terror and adrenaline took over my body. I sprinted, my heart hammering in my chest. I didn’t dare to look back. In a blur, I finally found myself outside the graveyard. I’m never coming back, ever. My friends were waiting, confused but relieved, before we all started heading to my house.

That night, the unease didn't leave me. It lingered around, settling in the corners of my room. At first, it was just a feeling, like something was watching me the whole time, just out of my sight. After that came the whispers of my name yet again. The repeated whispers and murmurs of my name ringing in my ears all the time, like a broken record that loops the same sound over and over, never ending. With the whispers came the movements too. Shapes and silhouettes, just out of my reach, gone in the second I try to focus on them. All of this won’t stop. It never stops. I can’t, I won’t, I just need it to end. Make it stop. Please, make it stop…I already tried to ignore it. I told myself it was nothing and that it's all just me. But now…now I can’t escape it.

No one ever saw what I saw nor did they ever believe me. And now, I’m afraid they never will.

“Breaking news tonight. Authorities are currently investigating the tragic death of a 19 year old male who fell off a rooftop late at night in New York city. Some witnesses have reported that the young man had been acting strangely concerning in the days leading up to the incident, with some describing unstable and irregular behaviour and claims that he is being followed. However, at this time, no evidence of foul play has been found. Authorities have concluded the

fall was accidental, but investigations remain ongoing. Friends and family have expressed their shock and sadness at this sudden loss. But questions remain, what led him to that rooftop in the first place?”

Vian’s Narrative

Never Alone

One summer night where the wind was breezing with bright stars shining, everything seemed so perfect until….. BOOM! *_crashing sounds_* A little girl named Caroline witnessed the accident. Her tears fell like raindrops because in that car was her best friend, Maria, and she was gone.

After trying to cope with the situation Caroline stopped crying, and told her parents what had just happened. The parents responded in confusion…

“Huh? We didn't hear anything about a car crash.”

In a city as small as theirs with only about 500 people, a car crash would have been major news. But there was nothing,no sirens, no reports. Accidents like that were rare.

The parents thought that Caroline had been going crazy ever since Maria had the accident. That night, Caroline’s parents tried everything: games, movies, and jokes to lift her spirits. The summer sunset cast a warm glow, but she just sat there, distant and unmoved. Their forced smiles faded as they realized nothing could reach her.

As the days passed, Caroline began seeing strange things, and an unshakable fear of being alone took over her…something completely unlike her. Her parents noticed that. Being concerned, they had decided to get her a therapist thinking it would help,and in case the situation gets worse. Caroline wasn’t happy, she thinks her parents are calling her crazy, at the end. After a lot of convincing, she agreed with the therapist's idea.

The moment the door creaked open, Caroline froze. The figure that stepped inside was unnaturally tall and thin, her skin an unsettling shade of pale. Something about her was... wrong.

“AHH what's this monster!’’

The parents looking at the therapist also looked confused, but decided to ignore it.

‘Well hello there it’s pleasant to finally meet you i’m Elma.” Said the therapist.

Caroline looked outside and saw….. Her best friend looked around in unease, she welcomed Elma in,they introduced each other ,and decided to have a quick talk about what Caroline has been dealing with.

“I just can't seem to get over the fact that my best friend has died”, said Caroline.

“I know how this might feel, was she the one that died in a car crash?”said Elma.

Caroline was confused ,because hardly anyone had seen or heard about that.As her parents were listening they both were confused that Maria never died ... .and how does Elma know about the fantasy ,Caroline's parents had seemed to gain more, and more suspicion from Elma as the days passed.

The parents noticed that over the week that Caroline has gotten more of a lunatic than ever.One night Caroline had to go perform a dance for a competition as she was getting ready she saw in the mirror Caroline’s reflection twisted, her own face vanishing. In its place, Elma grinned, her pale skin stretched too tight over her skull, eyes dark as endless pits.

”I will always be with you, Caroline”, she whispered, the words slithering into her ears like ice.

chuckling coming from the mirror that's what Caroline had heard from it, scared, she rushed down the hallway crashing threw all of the decorations, paintings,and plants she looked behind just to see Elma… chasing her as she gets closer to the exit the hallways kept getting tighter, and tighter,as caroline was running close to the exit almost escaping, and then..

Beep beep beep * alarm clock sounds*

“Wake up darling time to go to school!” Her mom said.

Just a dream. That’s all it was... right? But as Caroline sat at her desk, a shiver ran down her spine. From the corner of her eye, she caught a glimpse of the window. A reflection. Not hers. Elma was still smiling. Caroline blinked. The reflection was gone. Shaking it off, she headed to school, trying to focus. But something felt wrong. Maria wasn’t here. Has she ever been?.

Rayana’s Narrative

It was a stormy night, and I was home alone with my cousin Jenna. We were sitting on the couch with some snacks and popcorn while watching a horror movie on TV. The killing scene was on, and as we focused on the movie, we suddenly heard a loud "BOOM!" The door slammed shut due to the harsh wind. We jumped up in fright, screaming, "AHHHHH!"

Not even five minutes later, the lights started flickering on their own without anyone touching the switch. Realizing that no one was doing it, we ran upstairs, panting and screaming, "Go faster, go faster!" We reached the bedroom, grabbed the phone, and hid under the bed.

"Ring, ring, ring..." The phone rang as it connected.

"Hello, girls. Are you okay at home alone?" my mother asked.

"Mom, we are scared! I think there's a ghost in the house," I replied, shaking in fear.

"Yes, can you please come back home?" Jenna added.

"I'll be home in ten minutes. For now, keep calm and watch for anything unusual," my mother said before hanging up. Her reassurance helped us feel a little calmer.

Just as we started to get up from under the bed, "Whoosh!" The window flung open on its own. "Boom!" Thunder roared outside. Jenna began to panic, running around the room in fright. I tried to calm her down, reminding her that my mother was on the way. After a moment, she stopped running and took a deep breath.

"I can’t wait any longer for your mother to come," Jenna said nervously.

Suddenly, we heard footsteps on the stairs. "Click, click, click…" The sound echoed through the house. We looked at each other in confusion before sprinting back under the bed.

"Who do you think is out there?" Jenna whispered, panicking.

"I don’t know, but we need to stay calm. It might be my mother," I replied in a steady but low voice.

The footsteps suddenly stopped. We looked at each other in confusion, wondering where the sound had gone. After a tense moment of silence, the bedroom door unlocked from the other side and swung open to reveal… my mother!

Instantly, we ran to her and hugged her tightly, overwhelmed with relief.

"Are you girls alright?" she asked.

"We’re just happy you got here before anything else happened! We thought there was a ghost or someone in the house," Jenna replied.

"Well… there's something I need to tell you girls about…" my mother said with a smile.

"What is it?" Jenna and I asked in unison.

"IT WAS A PRANK!" my mother shouted, grinning from ear to ear.

Jenna and I looked at each other, then back at her in shock.

"So it was you the whole time and not a ghost?" Jenna asked, still processing everything.

My mother burst out laughing. "It was a good prank, right?" she said.

"It's not funny… but it was a good prank," I admitted.

We all hugged and decided to continue watching the movie, now feeling much safer than before.

Sara's Narrative

A shimmer in the night sky shining through the quiet city. A girl sighted this smiling happily. She had her beliefs; one of those believes that it was a wishing star. Not wanting to lose her chance, she blurted something to herself.

"I want to be sixteen!" she exclaimed.

After making the wish, she caught a glimpse of her watch; which concluded that she was awfully late for her bedtime. She then sprinted back home not wanting to cause trouble with her parents. While getting ready for bed, pressure began building up which caused her to forget her wish over time.

The Next Day

Slowly opening her eyes one by one to get ready for school. She had a wee feeling that something was wrong. Since she didn't have enough sleep the day before she didn't think much of it. She got up to pick her outfit for the day. While walking to fetch her clothes, she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror. In which it caused her to take a step back to make sure of what she witnessed.

"MOOOOOM!!" She screamed in shock.

Her mom questioned in concern," What's going on Julie?"

She then sped down the stairs, searching for answers from her mother. To discover what's going on she asked for her age.

She began hyperventilating as she crawled into a ball, sobbing that she lost seven years of her life, all because of a wish. Her worries built up, which caused her to pass out. After hours of unconsciousness she began to stir slightly; she opened her eyes and sat up straight , thinking what happened was just a dream, but to determine that she headed to the mirror her head held high. When she stood in front of the mirror she was still 16.

She began to sob uncontrollably while leisurely walking back to her bed. She thought that this is her life now and that she lost seven years of her life because of her beliefs in a wishing star she was stuck in a terrible situation. She was sobbing so hard that she slept but before she slept she made another wish.

“I want to be nine again!” Julie said while sobbing. when she made the wish the wishing star was there?

When she woke up, she was in the hospital because it was found that she's in a coma for two days and that it was all a dream.

Sumaya’s Narrative

Jena could feel her heart racing as she stared at herself in the mirror… everytime Jena marvels at herself in the mirror she always notices some sort of eccentric action happening behind her. She always tends to overlook this and assumes it's her twin brother, Adams, who always likes annoying or frightening her. Jena and Adams were twins and shared a room together, they have a love- hate relationship but often fight mostly because Adams, just like any typical brother, likes scaring her.

Jena's parents, Melinda and Watson, were architects and were busy people. They would come home quite late and just in time for their family dinners.

“Kids, we've been keeping this in for a while and wanted to tell you guys that we were planning on moving houses!” Melinda announces with a grin on her face.

In the new house they were designing, they decided for Jena and Adams to have separate rooms.

Jena became so happy knowing she can sleep in peace and thought to herself maybe the weird actions she thinks her brother does will stop.

“FINALLY, sharing a room with Adams is like sharing a room with an animal!” Jena exclaims.
“Be nice to your brother Jena,” Watson replies sternly.

Jena refuses and finally snitches on her brother for always scaring her especially when glancing at herself in the mirror. Her parents scolded Adams and told him to stop or else his phone would get taken. Adams tried defending himself saying he does not do unusual actions in the mirror. He simply just scares her by doing other things. However, everyone doubts that and continues on with their dinner.

A few weeks later, Jenal sees stuff behind her in the mirror. But one day, she was applying mascara while staring at the mirror but then forgot to close the mascara. As she comes back to looking at herself, she notices human eyeballs looking at her.

“Oh my god what is that” Jena whispers to herself.

“KIDS COME ON WE GOTTA GO!” Melinda yells from downstairs.

Jena quickly runs downstairs with a traumatized look on her face but couldn’t look into it more as she was getting rushed. They were going to see the new house! She noticed it wasn't so nice in the beginning because it was still under construction. However, the area of the house was located in Herne Bay Auckland, known as one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in New Zealand.

Jena thought of this as a new start and thought finally all the weird actions would not happen because she has her own room now.

Day by day, the house was slowly coming together. Watson and Melinda planned to have a built-in pool with a view of the beach and a football field for Adams to play with his dad. The mansion was perfectly built. The family decided to invite a few family friends over for a barbecue. Watson was known for his great skills in making barbecue.

They all had a nice dinner and nice discussions celebrating their soon to be house.
Later, Jena went up to her room as the guests left and as usual layed on her bed while scrolling on her phone. Adams enters the room and starts fighting with her just to annoy her but Jena then starts telling him to stop it. He finally stops but a while after she starts hearing cracks on the mirror she doesnt think and immediately runs down stairs to her dad. They both start accusing Adams because Jena said he was in the room earlier. Adams swears it wasn't him, yet, they still did not believe him.

A few weeks before moving, Jena starts sleeping in the same room as her parents because she was wary of Adams “scaring” her. They were finally moving houses in 3 days time and they started moving from their current house to the new one. Jena comes across the mirror while taking the stuff out of her room and decides to throw it away and get a new one for her vanity in the new house.

The day came where they finally settled in the new house. Jenas mirror still hasn't arrived because she ordered it online off of ikea. So she's been using her moms room to get ready. A weird thing Jena has realized is that while using her moms mirror nothing eccentric shows up but when using hers, a lot of scary, unexpected actions happen. Yet, she still tries to not overthink it as much and again thinks maybe it was just because of Adams.

Jenas and Adams birthday was on July 7th and during this time it was only a few weeks before their birthday. Their parents were talking to them about what they wanted to do for their birthday party. She was thinking of inviting loads of friends and throwing a pool party which Adams didn't really fancy as much. Adams was thinking of a guys only party thrown in the backyard whilst playing football and making his dad cook his famous barbecue. There was a slight argument between them about which one to do but the parents decided to mix up both of their wants. Jena and her friends in the pool whilst Adams friends playing football and Watson would prepare the barbecue for both. Jena and Adams had many friends in common from school so either way, it wouldn't be that bad mixing up the party.

The day of the birthday came and it was a busy day. Preparations of the party stressing their parents out. Food preparations for about 40 people, and it was quite a bit of a challenge decorating the backyard because Jena wanted a specific theme and so did Adams. Soon, it was almost time for the party and Jena was getting ready in her own room this time since her mirror had arrived to complete her entire vanity. Adams was bored and didn't have to get ready as early because he's a boy. Typical way of “getting ready” for the party for him would be a pair of swimming shorts with one of his favorite tops and his Nike slides. On the side is a bag for his after clothes to wear to eat dinner and cake cutting. Jena on the other hand, had to do her makeup, wear a cute swimsuit, and think of a pretty dress to wear for dinner and cake cutting as well.

Because Adams was bored and had a lot of time to spare, he wanted to scare Jena while she was getting ready. He slowly opens her door and says he forgot something in here. She was confused and asked why he was even here in the first place but he quickly threw up a lie on the spot and said it was because he and Melinda were taking some decorations from her room and forgot to give her one of them. He grabs a random candle saying this is what they needed. Jenas vanity wasn't located in the best place to have a clear view of who leaves and enters the room so it was easy for Adams to act like he left the room with the sound of the door closing while he was still in the room and stayed in but crawling on the floor. He started slowly carrying this doll that was on the floor and put it up in the corner of the mirror for Jena to notice. It took a while, but she eventually saw the doll moving and since it was far away it just looked like a black

tiny figure not like a barbie doll. Jena then got a jumpscare and yelled but saw little bits of hair that looked like Adams curly hair.

“OH MY GOD ADAMS AGAIN REALLY YOU SCARED ME WHY WOULD YOU DO THIS!?” Jena shouts.

Adams, however, was disappointed because Jena found out it was him.
“You guys always assume I'm always in the mirror scaring you, so might as well actually do it for once” Adams says while giggling.

Jena eventually kicks him out. She doesn't tell her parents because she wanted no drama today for both of them as it was a special day. It was about 1pm and their friends start arriving and giving them their gifts. The first few hours of the day were spent by people swimming at the pool, catching a color, drinking a cool drink, and music being played.

Later on, some went to play football while others remained swimming. It was time to eat and everyone was eating like there was no tomorrow. Burgers finished faster than they’d imagined, hotdogs getting taken out the grill second by second. It was safe to say the kids enjoyed the food and the amount of food they made was definitely accurate for how fast they finished it all. It was about 5pm and the girls all started showering, changing into their pretty dresses, and doing their hair and makeup. While the boys all changed into their outfits for the cake cutting and to take pictures in the picture booth they bought.

They all finished getting ready and went outside. Watson and Melinda brought Jena and Adams together for a family picture and pictures with their friends. Just before cutting the cake, Jena wanted to use the bathroom so she excused herself and promised she won't take long to be in time for the cake cutting. She ran upstairs, entered her room, closed the door behind her. She looked at herself in the mirror and saw the door handle opening and closing. As she saw this she was confused and scared at the same time while walking towards the door. Suddenly, it locks by itself and Jena starts panicking and breathing heavily trying to open the door many times. She looked back at the table to use her phone to try calling her dad because she was the only one inside the house at the moment. But then she realized she left her phone behind with everyone else outside.

“OK ADAMS THIS ISN'T FUNNY ANYMORE I'M NOT KIDDING, UNLOCK THE DOOR NOW”. Jena screams at the top of her lungs.

She keeps calling out her brother's name for him to stop but eventually gets the fact that it seriously isn't him locking her in.

“HELLO WHO EVER THIS IS, THIS ISN'T FUNNY OK GET ME OUT OF HERE”.
Jena yelled.

She hasn't gotten any reply and starts crying, wondering who and how this is happening.

Everyone else was waiting patiently for her to come to eat the cake and blow out the candles until she took too long and Melinda was starting to worry asking if anyone had seen her coming down yet. She starts stressing and says she's gonna go in to see if everythings okay. Watson stops her from walking in.

“Oh Melinda, don't be so dramatic, it's Jena! She takes a while and you know that. Besides, I don't think she would run away from her own birthday!” Watson said, trying to reassure her. Melinda decides to relax a bit and wait a few more minutes and try to entertain the people so they don't get bored.

It becomes way too long since Jena has gone to the bathroom and Melinda feels it in her heart that somethings off but continues to remain calm.

A blood-curdling scream was heard and everyone ran inside the house looking for Jena.

Melinda, Watson, and Adams knew her best and knew she would be using her own bathroom so they rushed to her room. Behind them, was a couple of Jena and Adams' closest friends and they all stayed back as the bathroom door was unlocking and opening itself while flickering the lights.

They all walked slowly towards the door with a fearful look on their face and the first thing they acknowledged was cracks and blood on the mirror. The mirror was high up which means they couldn't see Jena if she was on the floor which then clicked in their heads that they could not see Jena. So, they went looking for her around her room but Adams froze in front of the bathroom with a terrified look on his face and slowly turned his head downwards. The first thing he saw was Jena’s long hair and bits of glass with blood on the floor with her…

Judy’s Narrative

The House

In high school, a trio named Mia, Ava, and Jane were in their last year. They were in the classroom when the teacher announced a project in which they had to explore an old house and list the things they observed. Mia, Ava, and Jane decided to form a group.

The next day, they went to the library to find an old house. They found one that had belonged to a family 30 years ago, and apparently, the daughter had died from a sudden heart attack. The

house had been rumored to be haunted ever since. Mia thought it was a good idea to explore the house for their project. Ava and Jane agreed.

They planned to meet up on Friday. When the day came, they met outside the house. They made sure that each of them brought a flashlight, a pen, and a notebook. As they were about to open the door, an eerie feeling washed over them, filling them with fear.

To explore the house more quickly, they decided to split up. Everything was going well until Mia and Jane heard—

“AHHHHHHHH!!” Ava screamed.

Mia and Jane sprinted to Ava and found her unconscious on the ground.

Mia screamed, tears forming in her eyes, “AVA, AVA, WAKE UP!!”

Jane and Mia were so terrified that they abandoned Ava and started sprinting toward the door. Little did they know, the door was locked.

“What should we do now?” Jane asked in fear.

Mia, crying, replied, “I-I don’t k-know…”

The two decided to hide in a room. They found what appeared to be a little girl’s bedroom. Walking inside, they quickly closed the door. A few minutes later, out of nowhere, Jane started repeatedly chanting while staring intensely at Mia:

“LEAVE MY HOUSE NOW. LEAVE MY HOUSE NOW!!!”

Mia shot up in terror and bolted downstairs toward the door, but it was still locked. Suddenly, she heard a loud **BANG!** coming from the kitchen. She hesitated but then cautiously walked in to see what had caused it. As soon as she stepped inside, the door slammed shut by itself.

Mia sobbed even harder, trembling with fear.

She began hearing voices in her head and screamed, “STOP! P-PLEASE STOP!!”

She thought she was hallucinating. The terror was unbearable, and she couldn’t take it anymore. Overcome with fear and trauma, she ended her life right then and there.

Later, the police placed warning signs around the house, and no one ever entered it again.

Hager’s Narrative

Mathew and his three co-workers—Travis, Carter, and Luke—worked for the government. That night, they were attending an exclusive auction for a one-of-a-kind painting worth millions.

The venue was packed with wealthy collectors, the air thick with expensive perfume and quiet murmurs. Waiters moved through the crowd, handing out champagne. Mathew adjusted his suit as the bidding began.

“Let’s start at 10 million dollars,” the host announced.

Mathew raised a hand. “Fifteen million.”

The room went quiet.

“Fifteen million?” the host repeated. “Going once, going twice—”

“I’ll pay fifty,” a voice cut in.

Heads turned. A man in the back, dressed in black, sat calmly. No one recognized him.

Then—gunfire.

Screams erupted. “Everyone get down!” someone shouted. The mysterious bidder had pulled out a gun, and two men flanked him, rushing for the painting.

Mathew and his team ducked behind a table. “They’re stealing it!” Travis hissed.

“Not for long,” Carter muttered.

The thieves grabbed the painting and bolted for the door. Without thinking, Mathew and his team took off after them.

Outside, tires screeched as the thieves sped away in a black SUV.

“They’re getting away!” Travis panted.

“Not if we stop them,” Carter growled, jumping into their car.

The chase was wild. Streets blurred as Carter pushed the gas, weaving between traffic. The SUV swerved onto a side road, heading toward an old warehouse.

“They’re trying to lose us,” Luke muttered.

“They won’t,” Mathew said.

The SUV skidded to a stop, and the thieves ran inside. Mathew and his team followed, stepping into the dark, empty warehouse. Dust swirled in the air.

Then—click.

A gun cocked.

“You should’ve stayed out of this,” a voice sneered.

Mathew’s pulse pounded. “You should’ve picked an easier target.”

The first thief lunged. Mathew reacted instantly, grabbing his wrist and twisting hard. The gun clattered to the floor. Carter tackled another, and Luke swung a metal pipe, knocking the last one back.

The fight was fast, rough, and over in seconds. The thieves groaned on the floor, defeated.

Breathing hard, Mathew bent down and picked up the stolen painting. He ran a hand over the canvas, smudged with dust.

Travis let out a shaky laugh. “Okay… that was insane.”

Mathew grinned. “Yeah. But we got it.”

Sirens wailed in the distance. Time to go.